

Twelve Days With the Indians
by
Neil Brodie

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Cereal Jan. 4 1932

Mr. Laurie

Dear Sir

In answer to yours of the 29th will say that on conditions that you publish my story in full, that is not change any statement or cut out any part and publish it within three weeks of the time you receive it.

I will give it to you just asking a few copy's I will expect you to fix the punctuation ^{marks} as I know very little about them. If you agree to the above, let me know at once. I will start now and will have over two thousand words in the story. I remember your father, I saw the Sternwheeler ~~coming up~~ to Battleford May 24th and ^{have} a picture of her at the landing the Gen. and you would be aboard.

Veil Brodie

Cereal

Alberta

P.S.

my story will be true.

Was Major General J. Wimburn Laurie a relation of yours?

(over)

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Twelve Days With The Indians

May 14—May 26, 1885

BY

NEIL BRODIE CEREAL, ALTA.



Being his experience in
Poundmaker's camp
During the Rebellion of
1885



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Twelve Days With The Indians

By Neil Brodie, Cereal, Alta.

Being his experience in Poundmaker's Camp
During the Rebellion of 1885.

On Thursday, May 14th, 1885, about 10 a.m., I and twenty others who were freighting supplies with twenty-one yoke of oxen for Col. Otter's column from Swift Current to Battleford, were about twelve miles south of Battleford in the Eagle Hills, where there were small bluffs of poplar, when Poundmaker's warriors surrounded us. We ran our oxen into a circle with the wagons outside and with ten rifles held back the Indians. Suddenly a half-breed rode out, with his hands high over his head, signalling for a parley. Frank Cox, one of the few who kept all his wits, agreed to go out and talk if I would protect him. I drew a bead on the half-breed's breast and Frank, walking out under my rifle, made terms of surrender. We were to leave all; they to escort us as near to Battleford as they could risk their own lives.

There were about three hundred well-armed Indians and half-breeds; besides a great many more with shot guns, war clubs, tomahawks and knives; perhaps,

eight hundred altogether. Now, these Indians and half-breeds, through Jobin and Sayers, accepted these conditions. We started with an escort of about twenty horsemen, we hanging on to the stirrup straps as we ran. We ran for about a mile when another small band of Indians, about twenty in number, rode us down and demanded that we return to camp or die here. Our escort said he could not keep his promise. However, he kept them from shooting us.

We went back to the Indian camp and they held a council to decide what to do with us. The chief, minor chiefs and principal warriors, perhaps thirty, sat down in a circle. The speaker rose and gave his opinion which was not hard to understand although we could not speak their language. If the speaker wanted to kill us, he would dance around with his rifle in the hollow of his arm and speak loud and fast. If he was willing to spare our lives, he would leave his rifle on the ground and walk around the cir-

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cle and talk quietly. Finally they agreed to keep us alive if none of us tried to run away. If we did, then the blood-thirsty had the privilege of killing the rest.

We, of course, accepted the terms. Then Chief Poundmaker, with an interpreter, had a talk with us. He said our lives were safe and advised us to thank God. Asked if there was anything we wanted, I asked that he give us an interpreter to camp with us so that we might know what was wanted. He consented and gave us a nice quiet man, who was good company and gave us good advice, as how to get on with the Indians. When an Indian visited us and expressed a wish to kill the prisoners, this man let us know his wish. We all requested that our clothes be returned. They took my bed, coat and vest, and I gave them my money, thirty-four dollars. I did not like parting with my cash (Scotch). In fact, I refused to give it up, although they threatened me with a loaded rifle and saying "Shunia", but on the advice of Jobin not to vex the Indians, I gave up my money.

Shortly after this the whole camp started moving south-east. A minor chief selected me to drive his oxen. His wife and I

occupied the front seat; just behind me was my guard, armed with a three and a half foot cutter bar of a mowing machine, all the sections removed but five. It was now about three o'clock when all the outriders doubled back and ordered us to drive to a deep ravine that we had just passed through. We were travelling in five columns, covering about one quarter section each way when we came to a halt. The armed sharpshooters passed forward. With them was Charles Bremner, riding a bay pony with a rifle across his saddle-bow. When they came back they told me that they had killed a redcoat, N. W. M. P. [Elliott]. I did not see the shooting but heard it. Elliott did not even wound an Indian. He was shot in the back of the head. They buried him by carrying soil from a badger mound close by. Again we moved south-east, my boss scouting about four hundred yards in front of me. I was driving the lead team on the left hand column. We camped about 5 30 o'clock.

My host killed a calf for supper. His wife, her sisters and mother, prepared supper of peeled potatoes, boiled meat, bannocks, hard tack, tea, milk and sugar. We

sat on our heels, tailor fashion in the teepee around the food. I at my hostess' right; and she saw that I had plenty to eat. This ended the first day. I was driving for another Indian next day, moving in the same direction. Again my hostess was good to me. This has been my experience with very few exceptions, that the women were good. On passing a creek I let my guard know that I was going to get a drink. I let the oxen go by themselves. When I had a drink, I ran to catch the team, passing a dear old squaw, who caught me by the wrist and rubbed my hand all over her head. Here was sympathy for me without a word being spoken. I smiled in return for her kindness.

A few hours before our capture we were joined by eight horse teamsters. These made a dash for liberty, three of our party going with them. Two got clear away, outriding the Indians. The third one and a horse teamster, riding his team with the neck-rope on, were overtaken by bullets from the enemies' rifles and decided to surrender. They were robbed of their watches, knives and trinkets; two hours later the springs and wheels were decorating the Indians' hair. "Me

grandfather's watch", said Paddy. Another horse teamster, a young Frenchman, jumped off his horse, which was blind, and took shelter in a bluff of poplars until the evening, expecting the Indians to be away. He was caught and asking what they intended doing with him, was told that he would be taken to the ravine where the other prisoners were. Ravine being translated as "hole" gave this poor fellow a bad fright. He certainly was glad to see us alive, and told me so.

The third night was very cold, there being about one quarter of an inch of ice on the water in a slough close to our camp. We were sleeping on the ground between two wagons which had a canvas thrown over them. We had but one double blanket to six men. Two of the men thought they would be warmer in one of the wagons but when they got in they could not be seen. We had a guard all around, but about every hour some Indian who did not trust them, counted us to see if we were all there. I was asleep and awakened with a tremendous hubbub. An Indian was standing with one foot on each side of me (close to my heart) with a candle in one hand and a knife in the other, counting

with his butcher knife for a pointer. Two men short; so they were pleased, for now they could start the killing. About this time I raised my head off my pillow (which was very likely my boots as I made a practice of using them for a pillow), when the interpreter called, "Lie down, the Indian thinks you are going to run away." Our good interpreter maintained that none had left but could not account for the missing men. This kept up for about twenty minutes when the men were found and all was peace again. Just here I might say it was a relief to be taken by the Indians to drive their chariots, for then I got away from the oft repeated question, "How long have we to live?" My answer was, "Perhaps five minutes; perhaps we might live to be old men". Then again by moving from place to place I had a good chance to see the Indians at home.

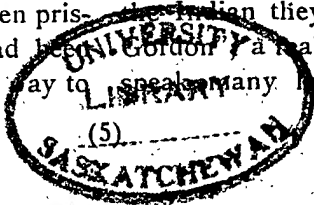
We camped there waiting for news from Riel, who was fighting Gen. Middleton, at Battleford. Poundmaker's runners were expected to bring good news but brought word that Riel had lost the battle and was taken prisoner, and that Dumont had been wounded and was on his way to

the States. Then the Indians and halfbreeds put away their arms and, after a couple of councils, decided to take the prisoners to Battleford and ask for terms.

We were taken in four or five wagons. Just as we were ready to start Strike-him-on-the-back struck each of us on the shoulders with a quirt. This was on the 22nd. On the 26th Poundmaker and his warriors surrendered without terms. Very few who read this will realize that we had made one trip of over two hundred miles and were on our second of over one hundred when we were caught.

Poundmaker, head chief of the big camp, which included seven reserves, was a very fine looking Indian. Tall, with very long hair hanging in two braids in front. Dressed in blanket shaps, moccasins, cow hide waistcoat covered with rows of round headed brass tacks; sometimes carrying his Pukamakin.

Another Indian that I remember very well, Jacob by name, who came to our lodge and enquired of our welfare, and gave us some clothes to replace those taken from us. Then there was the Indian they called "General Gordon" a real dandy who could speak many languages, was an



Indian this time, next time a half-breed. He told me that he had killed one poor devil. He was in shackles when we left the Indian camp. He was hung for killing Bernard Tremond. His sweet-heart made him a nice pair of moccasins for his last journey. So said W. B. Caneron, of Big Bear fame. There were very few wounded that I saw. Their doctor and I had dinner together one day after attending to the wounded which he did very well. The others were just Indians, except one old buck, about seventy-two years old, dressed in a short, dirty white cotton shirt and moccasins—nothing more—carrying a bow and sheaf of arrows. He came in among us, searching our pockets for money and trinkets, straddling over the heads of those who were sitting. One resented this and gave him a "skelp". He just smiled and passed.

The squaws came often to have a look at the prisoners. They did not say much; just sat on the ground, nursing their "papooses", who were nude as a rule. I think they pitied us, more than they rejoiced in our misfortune. One old squaw, who was poor and alone, (she had all her world's goods on the travois of a fat spotted dog) let

me know that she was sorry for me. One young squaw asked me to open a two pound can of Armour's beef for her. I placed it on a board and with a common axe cut it in two with one sharp blow. Then I was a "hero" and had to repeat the trick for others.

Father Cochon, who died in 1927, gave us his tent for two nights. Instructor Jefferson had a long talk with me, for the benefit of the Indians, who wanted to know what was thought of the war by the government at Regina and were disappointed that they did not make a greater impression. "They thought that they were making a small earthquake", said Jefferson.

The first night with the Indians we were given a tent and some blankets. When these were divided I got none and, not being good at pushing for the best place, I was relegated to the door of the tent. Every little while some Indian came to have a look at us. One of them, seeing me without blanket, coat or vest, returned with a very rare article, a rabbit skin blanket, under which I went sound asleep and forgot all my troubles.

On being released we were taken to Col. Otter for an examination. Then he had guides ap-

pointed to find us sleeping quarters but did not even mention supper; we had no dinner that day. Our sleeping quarters were on the east end of the plateau. On the way there our guides, members of the Queen's Own, asked us a great number of questions and we were quite willing to talk, after nine days of very little talking. It was by this time quite dark and with so much talk we failed to hear the challenge of the sentry, who called out the main guard, thinking we were Indians. The officer's command to "HALT" would make the deaf hear. Then when he learned who we were and why we were there, he asked more questions; in fact, the whole guard questioned us some more. Tuesday, Angus Kennedy, of the Montreal Witness, also questioned me. He was then a young man with golden hair; the last picture I saw of him his hair appeared to be grey.

On the 26th, Gen. Middleton sat on a chair (north of the Battle River) facing west; at about fifteen feet sat P. Hourie on a chair, facing east. The Indians sat on the ground to the south. I stood about fifteen feet north of the general, inside the soldiers' lines.

The first question or statement was, "Poundmaker, you are ac-

cused of high treason. What have you to say?" Then after a dispute or talk between Hourie and Poundmaker, the interpreter made the statement, "There is no such a word as high treason in the Crée language." I never saw this recorded, so take note of the substitute, "You are accused of throwing sticks at the Queen and trying to knock her bonnet off". Sir Fred just nodded and asked more questions. Finally he asked for all murderers and leaders. The soldiers arrested about one dozen, including the Indian who whacked us on the back. The Indians returned all our oxen but two; these we found two days later, tied in a bluff very hungry. Some of the freight stolen from us was returned. This I took to the storehouse in the fort.

Although the Indians could not speak English, it was wonderful how they could make us understand. They are pastmasters of the sign language. I am satisfied that I had many friends among the Indians when we left. The only one I ever met since, gave me his hand with a smile. We were offered some rare presents to gain our favor. One was an ivory covered prayer book which I did not accept but traded hats with Nitchie and wore his hat which pleased him very much.

At Swift Current our train of twenty-one yoke of oxen was divided into two companies with a leader to each. Donald McLean led the first and Frank Cox the other. I was the last on the line and had charge of the food for seven teams and their drivers. There were stations at certain places along the trail. Some officers in charge had very small hearts. With these we had to quarrel to get a few lumps of sugar for our tea; others had their hearts in the right place and gave us sugar, tea, biscuits, corned beef and hard tack, besides hay for the oxen, saying "Yes, of course; the government provides it and you shall have it."

We were not armed on the first trip, so when about fifteen miles from Battleford we camped and waited for an escort that our leaders had sent for by a company of scouts who passed us the day before. A squad of twenty Mounted Police came for us. When about eight miles from town we camped, putting the wagons in a ring for protection, the men and teams inside.

I was put on guard on the west side, the police supplying me with a heavy revolver. About eleven o'clock we located a scout of Poundmaker's taking stock of

us. He was not molested. Everything became quiet about one o'clock; horses quit stamping, oxen lay down; men went to sleep; officers walked around softly; I was lying under a wagon with head and shoulders outside the ring, the revolver under my hand, when I heard, "Are you asleep?" "No, sir" That was the truth or I could not have answered.

Before starting for second load we asked for an escort through the hills. Colonel Otter sent a mounted policeman with orders for us to move on in fifteen minutes or we would be put under arrest and our teams taken from us and given others to drive. We weakened and obeyed orders. But Otter was wrong; he had not driven the Indians out of the hills nor frightened them one little bit, as we afterwards found out.

On November 16th, 1885, I was driving four yoke of oxen with four loads of fifty-two bushels of wheat each, on my way to Regina. When just west of the N. W. M. P. barracks I was stopped by a policeman who told me to turn to the right and keep outside the stakes with a red flag on them. Going around the stakes was all "turtleback"; no road at all. If these oxen had

not been well trained to go by the voice alone I would have had a big job. We got to the main road; then two miles and we were in Regina. The first salute I got was, "Riel is dead". He was being hung while I was going around the stakes.

On May 23rd, 1885, southwest of the barracks in Battleford, I met two men carrying a fish that

they had caught in the Battle River that day. They had a pole through its gills and on their shoulders, and then its tail trailed on the ground. It must have been over five feet. Sorry I have not the names of these men. Perhaps they are alive and remember the incident.

NEIL BRODIE,
Cereal, Alta.

